

PUBLIC TESTIMONY 10/19/20

Public Testimony #1

Mayor and Council,

As I've stated in previous comments, the issue of addressing the needs of the homeless in our community could not be more critical than it is currently. The threat of fire and the continuing pandemic leave the council with few options but to address this issue.

The staff report lays out the scant resources available to address this dire need. I believe this reality demands that the council look to new revenue streams to find solutions, we can no longer defer this issue or place responsibility on other government entities. Ashland needs to find solutions that ensure the safety of our community as the potential costs and losses are much too great.

I believe there are a few real options that Ashland needs to look at with immediacy:

1. Progressive income tax similar to that passed by the City of Portland. The Portland example places a marginal 1% tax on individuals making more than \$125,000 and couples making over \$200,000 as well as a separate 1% tax on businesses that generate \$5 million a year in revenue. This could generate a significant amount to address these needs.
2. Tax on excessive housing size. Housing over 2,500 sq.ft. should be taxed as a luxury. This seems like a very appropriate means of funding the needs of the unhoused.
3. Impervious surface tax. Roseburg has utilized a tax on impervious surfaces to offset storm drain costs. Although this may be more appropriate for offsetting the Public Safety Utility fee, the regressive subsidy to the General Fund that has been maintained despite the fact that the police it was intended to fund have been cut, this could be used to fund homeless services.

Additionally, I believe Ashland should be looking to low-cost solutions. Under ORS 446.265, the city has the authority to develop emergency transitional housing: <https://www.oregonlaws.org/ors/446.265>

Purchasing Yurts can be relatively inexpensive and the city has numerous lots including the Hargadine St. Parking Garage that are currently underutilized. The parking garage offers various opportunities as an existing structure that provides some protection from the elements.

I believe there are solutions if the council has the will. Spikes in COVID cases and the potential for devastating fires are not options the council should negligently allow proceed.

Respectfully,
Eric Navickas